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Words To Young Christians

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Words to Young Christians

Particularly to Those of the
Mennonite Church

By

C. H. WEDEL
Late President of Bethel College

Translated by

THEODORE O. WEDEL
Professor of English, Carleton College.

THE MENNONITE BOOK CONCERN
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TO OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

This little book by Professor C. H. Wedel, late President of Bethel College, was first published in the German language and has thus been a source of blessing and inspiration to many.

As we are in a period of transition, the request came to the Board of Publication of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America to make these "Words" available for you. The copyright that was held by the Bethel College corporation was kindly given to our Board.

The Board was agreed that Dr. Theodore O. Wedel, Professor of English at Carleton College, Northfield, Minn., son of the author, should be requested to make the translation and he unhesitatingly consented to this "labor of love," for which we thank him.

A few of the stanzas of verse were translated or chosen by the undersigned.

We, herewith, present and recommend the book to you and trust that its warm Christian message in its new clothes will continue to find ready response in many hearts.

C. E. Krehbiel, Newton, Kansas
Chairman of the Board.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

This little volume was one of the last which my father wrote. For twenty years he had labored as a preacher and teacher in Bethel College, had written text-books in Biblical scholarship and a history of the Mennonites. Yet I think I am right in saying that this little book of advice to young Christians was among all his writings the one which he was happiest in leaving as a legacy to his church and his friends. During those last years before his untimely death at the age of 49, he seemed to work with a premonition that the end was near.

It is difficult for me as a son to speak with detachment of my father, even though a space of fifteen years has intervened since last I knew him in the flesh. Yet I cannot withhold at least a word regarding him. He was one of those rarely gifted men who are born to be saints, who live in an atmosphere of religion, for whom thoughts on spiritual things are as natural as the air they breathe. I am sure that I am not alone in paying him this tribute. Men of his character are in some respects handicapped for the rough work of society. They live much to themselves; they are not always successful in action; they are shy, and are sometimes mistakenly thought to be proud.

My father, in a word, was a Christian mystic. A mystic is a man for whom the supernatural is as real as the world of sight and touch and sound. The essence of mysticism is contained in a little Latin saying of one of the great Christian teachers of the seventeenth century, a saying which my father would have loved: "Claude fenestras, ut luceat domus." "Darken the windows, so that the house may be full of light." It means to remind us of the fact that the divine voices, still and small, do not come to us in the roar of busi-

ness, or the whirls of pleasure, but only as they came to Elijah, after the earthquake and the fire, when we withdraw ourselves from ourselves and go up into a mountain to pray. It reminds us also of the fact that religion consists essentially of this contact with a kingdom not of this world, with a God in whose sight a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.

Religion, I think it may be said, is a combination of morality and otherworldliness. And of these two elements, it is the latter which is the more important, and the one which in our day when the world is so visibly growing better, abolishing war and prohibiting wine, is in danger of being forgotten. For let the world become ever so perfect and men in society ever so good, the voice of religion is still ready to cry with the prophet Isaiah: "All flesh is grass and all goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass." It is morality which is covered by the second great commandment: "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Otherworldliness is the essence of the first commandment, which throws us first of all upon God. The glory of the Mennonite tradition is that it did not try to divorce the two, did not strive merely to make the world better, but remembered that to seek after God means above all to become spiritually minded, to dwell in a "city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." Even our traditions of pacifism were prompted by otherworldliness, rather than a love of peace at any price—a fact which ought to make us sceptical of many of the pacifistic movements of our day. War, after all, is only one among many manifestations of the fact that the kingdom of God is not of this world. And it is a great folly to think that in our day we can continue our mad rush for pleasure and for wealth and yet have peace as an added luxury, without paying the price of religion, self-denial, and living according to

the law of the spirit and not according to the law of the flesh.

The Mennonite tradition, so well described in this little book, is a great tradition precisely because it joined a protest against war and the brutalities of civilization to a sincere attempt to live the life of the spirit. It maintained a high code of morality and at the same time an otherworldly faith in God, in individual repentance and salvation. And no greater task confronts the church today than that of keeping alive a hunger for the things not of this world, a sense of the reality of the supernatural, a witnessing in everyday life to the truth of Jesus' saying that he who looseth his life shall find it.

Theodore O. Wedel.

Northfield, Minnesota
January 25, 1926

AN IMPORTANT STEP

Dear Friend:

You have joined a church! In so doing you have become a member, not merely of a local congregation, but of the "church universal throughout all the world." What act of a man's life could be of greater significance than this? May the memory of this hour go with you through the years to come—the memory of the hour when you were kneeling with glowing cheeks, receiving holy baptism!

A sacred moment like this marks the close of a definite chapter in the story of your life, and the opening of a new. Formal entrance into the Christian church signifies nothing less than surrender to the Lord, to God who hath made us, who hath destined us to communion with Himself, so that our souls find rest nowhere but in Him. For it is He who first

loved us in Christ, reconciled us to Himself and opened to us the stores of His grace.

By way of baptism upon confession of faith you have now entered upon holy fellowship with Christ and all those who love Him. All the promises made to those who are of Christ now apply to you. As His own it is a great thing to have the assurance of God's mercy in sorrow as well as in joy, knowing that without His will no hair of our head is harmed. Can we do ought else than go on our way rejoicing? In the merits of Christ a true anchor is ours in life and in death for He, as the Good Shepherd, is to walk by our side with His Spirit and His gifts, until we return again home to His own kingdom of glory.

And as you cast a look back over your past life, is it not with a feeling of thankfulness toward the Lord your God, who loved you from everlasting and has brought you to Himself because of His mercy and His love? Even in your life thus far you can discern a plan and a purpose; even over you God's eye has watched—whether your path, of life hitherto was strewn with roses or was full of thorns whether you walked in sunshine, as in the laughter of a morning in spring, or trod a dark and dreary road, as in the fogs of autumn—in sunshine and in rain God followed you and sought you, despite your weaknesses and your sins, until you learned to seek Him and your heart learned to yearn for His peace; until you discovered His loving voice in His written word and learned to read His message in His works; until you experienced the whispering of His spirit in your soul, and the Gospel became for you literally the "good news" which caused you to partake of springs of living water.

You have now learned—and it is a lesson of infinite meaning to you—that only Jesus can heal the deep wounds of the heart, that only Jesus can make life's sunshine real, that without Him there is always something wanting. You

may have experienced in the past many happy hours, but real happiness never. Can you think, therefore, of anything greater than that you have vowed to be His, His disciple, His follower, and that he is yours with all His promises! Now you must surely confess that those hours during which you permitted His Spirit to speak to yours, in which you inwardly turned toward Him, were really the most blessed hours of your life. And you will feel like singing with the venerable Isaac Watts:

When I survey the wondrous cross
  On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
  And pour contempt on all my pride.
Were the whole realm of nature mine,
  That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
  Demands my soul, my life, my all.

No subject has inspired the sacred poets with holier strains than the sorrows of a life of sin and the blessed assurance which comes with an experience of God's mercy. Saint Augustine gave expression to his feelings in words like these:

In wicked teachings and in evil deed
  My sunny days of youth sped madly past —
I have a heart, and failed to give Thee heed?
  O marvelous Grace that now I'm Thine at last!

He, like many a man, has had the experience of Christian in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, who found that at sight of the Crucified his load of sin rolled from his shoulders. Surely your own testimony is also to the effect that only then did you find inward peace when you had cast your eyes upon the Cross. Thitherward God's path had led you through joy and sorrow, in order that you might there discover your real wants and desires. Now in baptism you have embraced this saving Cross and dedicated your life to Him who died

for you. You have pledged loyalty to Him and His banner —a vow of fidelity to a Master and a King.

"In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wreck of time;
All the light of sacred story
Gathers round its head sublime.
Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure
By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there, that knows no measure,
Joys that through all time abide."

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism, therefore, signifies for us a sacred rite, ordained by word of Christ and the example of the apostles, which the Christian church, through its servants, performs upon those who have consciously decided to turn from the ways of this world, to accept Christ, the Son of God, as their Savior, and to enter into fellowship by faith with His church, where they may grow into His likeness.

Viewed from the human side, baptism is an act of confession of faith; viewed from the side of God, it embodies a concrete and symbolical assurance of divine spiritual power unto salvation. For you, who have grown up in the midst of a Christian nurture, baptism is the natural outcome of a longer period of inner spiritual growth.

We hope and expect that the means of grace that are current among us will lead those who grew up to manhood and womanhood in our midst to Christ and His church. For more than you are aware, perhaps, your Christian environment has influenced you. All Christian privileges were yours even from childhood; you, too, were included in the glorious promise of Christ: "Suffer the little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of

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heaven." As a result of this injunction the blessings of a Christian education fell to your share. Yours would have been a life without sunshine had this not been so. More than one of the institutions of the church has been a blessing to you. Could you conceive of a childhood without the festivities of Christmas or the blessed peace of Sunday? At times, perhaps, these Christian influences seemed a burden and a bother; at times you would have liked to "let go" a bit; nevertheless, there must have remained in your consciousness the feeling that the ways of the Lord and of His children are the ways of peace and of inward happiness.

And now as a church member, you are no longer merely one who partakes of its benefits without sharing its burdens. You are a citizen in the kingdom of God. In baptism your convictions have found expression; you have testified publicly that in Christ you, too, have found the pearl of great price, which will remain for you a personal possession. You might repeat the words of a Cyprian, words which he spoke on the occasion of his baptism: "A pure ray of celestial light poured into my soul, now reconciled to its God my weakness became strength; what once appeared impossible, no longer seemed thus."

We may recall the fact that in the early church baptism was a *sacrament*. The word dates back to the days of pagan Rome, when it signified a soldier's oath, or again, in later times, the first money paid out to a new recruit. The term received a new and richer meaning within the church, a meaning which was only gradually lost or adulterated. It was interpreted wrongly when it came to signify a kind of magic rite, as though the outward form, and it only, could create a rebirth in the human soul. Hence arose the wrong notion that all unbaptized children were eternally lost. Such an idea is clearly not to be found in Holy Writ. One has merely to read the tenth chapter of Acts to see that the Holy Spirit may be received even without preliminary

baptism. It was because of a revolt against the wrong doctrines of the church that the Waldensians refrained from baptism altogether, a fact which brought upon them much persecution. The Brethren of Moravia, so documents for the year 1539 tell us, accepted a number of catechists without baptism, merely requiring a promise that they would submit themselves to be baptized so soon as a time of peace should offer opportunity. It is a fact, too, I think, that all those who have become convinced of the rightness of adult baptism, though they do not exaggerate its importance, nevertheless desire it, and willingly obey the injunction of our Lord (Matt. 28:18-20) and of Saint Peter (Acts 2:38) in order to secure its promised blessing.

Though the Bible does not provoke over-emphasis of the outward act, yet why should we set aside such rites and ceremonies as Christ has set up for the guidance of His church? Even champions of infant baptism have admitted that our doctrines are the right ones. One could cite such an authority as Dr. Tobias Beck of Tuebingen. They maintain, to be sure, that infant baptism has become venerable and permissible through long usage. But tradition might better be employed as an argument on our side, for the early church knew only baptism of adults. And for us the doctrine has become a hallowed and sacred heritage, sanctified by the blood of ten thousand martyrs. It seems indeed as though we had been chosen by divine Providence to remain its champions.

I wish to say a few words about the manner or form of baptism itself. It goes without saying that you must have thought about it now and then; it is indeed important to acquire a proper conception about it. The external rite of baptism is, of course, a symbol, a sign which makes visible something that goes on within. Man is a sign-loving creature, always on the lookout for symbols which will translate the

invisible objects of faith into something that can be felt and touched and seen.

The religion of the Old Testament was rich in ritual —ceremonies which were often full of spiritual meaning, clothing heavenly truths—shadows, so to speak, of the world beyond the veil of the senses. Symbols play no such role in the New Testament. The latter was in fact meant to be a fulfillment of the Old; hence we find no priestly robes, no Holy of Holies, no petty laws regulating fasting and feast-days. It was enough that God had revealed Himself once for all in Christ, that Christ should henceforth unlock for us the unseen means of salvation, should be our visible ideal and pattern. The law of the Spirit replaced the law of the letter.

Only two symbolic rites were instituted by our Lord—Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These contain promises of divine blessings and confessions of the church; hence even their external form is of importance.

The New Testament teachings regarding baptism emphasize the fact that it brings with it the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19). As water is poured on the head to cleanse it, as oil is administered to anoint it, so shall the gift of the Holy Spirit descend upon it from on high. Note, if you will, the meaning of the Greek word "baptizein." In common usage it meant "dip," or "dip in," or again "to pour out upon." The attempt made by the Baptists to confine the idea of baptism to the practice of immersion can neither be established on a scientific nor on a Biblical basis, and it ignores the testimony of the Lord in history. The word "baptizein" has experienced an enlargement of meaning in the course of time, like many other words. The word "burial," for example, covers many forms of interment. The same is true of "praying" and "saluting." The word "baptizein" is used in the New Testament to signify a cermony of cleans-

ing, followed by an outpouring of the Spirit from above. The phrase, "being baptized with the Holy Spirit" simply excludes any notion of "immersion." It would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of immersion in connection with the events of Pentecost; or the baptism in Caesarea; or of the jailor in Philippi; or of the Ethiopian treasurer. It is probably true that immersion was practiced in apostolic times; the spread of the practice in later times gives evidence of this. But to find specific references to it in the New Testament is difficult. One passage somethimes cited is Romans 6:3ff. But a careful study of the context must lead to the conclusion that the text as it stands can only forcibly be interpreted as referring to the form of baptism. In baptism, so runs the argument of the apostle, the old man is crucified, dies, and is buried, so that he ceases to rule over us. The new man rises with Christ, and now walks with Christ, endowed with new powers of life in holiness and purity. How can anyone discover here specific teachings regarding the form of baptism? The apostle refers rather to the inner meaning

Undoubtedly the early church employed various forms of baptism; hence all the more reason not to exaggerate the outward ceremony. The spirit of the New Testament is not bound to the letter; if it were, we must needs emulate the early church in all its church practices, celebrating the communion, for example, only in the evening, or only when we actually recline at the tables as did Jesus and the twelve.

The testimony of history is also important. The apostles interpreted history wisely enough to see that circumcision was not required of heathen Christians. We, too, can see plainly, from the history of our forefathers, that the Lord has graciously added His blessings to the various forms of baptism practiced by them. The Anabaptists and Mennonites of the 16th century baptized, sometimes in private houses, sometimes in rivers, usually

perhaps in meeting houses by sprinkling—often, too, in out-of-the-way places, behind bushes, or in secret chambers. Menno Simons seems to have baptized by sprinkling. It appears to be a fact, however, that a difference in the form of baptism did not cause friction between various congregations. Even the Brethren of Moravia baptized at times in rivers; and in a few Dutch congregations, down to our times, both methods appear side by side.

The extreme view of the Baptist denomination, therefore, is not in harmony with our traditions—a tradition which, through centuries of persecution, has certainly found grace with God. It needs to be said at times that arguing concerning the form of baptism may become child's play. This happens in cases where weaker minds are brought to doubt their soul's salvation because of exaggeration of minor details of procedure.

True children of God are united under the banner of the Cross, and no outward difference of form, be it ever so precious to the individual believer, dare ever to become a wall so high as to prevent fraternal intercourse. We must not wantonly attack the prejudices of others in minor matters, so long as they can agree with us in essentials. Spurgeon, though a staunch Baptist, did not deny to members of other denominations access to the communion table. Let us, too, be ready, at fitting times and places, to enjoy fellowship with all who love with a whole heart the Lord Jesus Christ; let us practice here on earth a little of that communion of saints which we hope to enjoy hereafter in glory.

BAPTISM—A COVENANT WITH CHRIST

Baptism, then, is the making of a covenant with Christ. The making of such a covenant need, of course, not wait until the time of open avowal. Many young men and young women have died in grace before they were formally baptized. Their inner convictions had been more matured than they themselves were ready to confess in public. God gives freely of His Spirit to all who ask and has not tied Himself to an external ceremony. Nevertheless, it is still true that baptism must not be neglected. It offers an opportunity to express before the world the matured convictions of heart and mind; as the bride is glad to speak forth her "yes" before the altar. That is why baptism belongs to the beginning not the end, of an acknowledged spiritual life. Many a youth delays it too long. The Christians of the apostolic age did not wait with baptism until they had found an answer to every religious question. Think of the amount of advice the apostles still find it necessary to pour out in their epistles. In modern times, with the quarreling of sects, the question of baptism has, indeed, become an increasingly difficult one; yet the main fact regarding it has not changed; it is still a public confession and a new resolve to follow Christ as Lord and Master. And, clearly, no one who from his youth has learned to read the Word of God can desire a postponement of a decision on so vital a question. A decision once reached, open confession ought to follow as a matter of course, not a waiting like that of Constantine the Great, who decided to acknowledge himself a Christian only on his death-bed.

Baptism, therefore, is not a mere convention, not a mere thing of habit or tradition, but a personal act of

confession, which signifies in all sincerity a turning away from a godless life and an entering upon a life as a follower of Christ with the help of the Holy Spirit. Baptism constitutes a visible line of separation between Christians and non-Christians. The latter may indeed stand at the border of God's kingdom, and may even belong to it essentially, but without baptism they still lack something. That is why baptism is a cause of division even among Christians. Complete obedience to the commands of our Lord leads clearly to baptism. It is not a matter of choice for the true believer whether or not to submit to baptism. It is an integral part of the Christian religion and is designed to give us inward firmness. The children of Israel, by their passage through the Red Sea, were bound as with baptismal ties to their leader Moses. Egypt and Egypt's king now lay behind. They had bidden farewell to the wonders and glories as also to the slavery and tyranny of that ancient country. The new watchword was: "No looking back—onward to Jerusalem!" Such inward and outward facing about is what baptism should mean today.

Those who enter the Christian fellowship from out of paganism or the more manifest forms of godless living find no difficulty in realizing the seriousness of the step they are taking. The ancient Germans, for example, were forced, on the occasion of their baptism, to forswear the devil and all their ancestral gods, and to take a new pledge of loyalty and obedience. A vivid incident of history is the scene where Bishop Remigius baptized Clovis, the first king of the Franks, meeting the new convert with the words: "Bow thy head, thou proud Sigambian king; burn what hitherto thou hast worshipped; worship what hitherto thou hast burned!" And it meant something in those early Christian centuries to be baptized. It meant certain death for thousands.

Quite naturally the Eastern (Greek Catholic) church, always eager for a rich and emotional ritual, clothed the baptismal rite with vivid and meaningful ceremonies. Easter night was a favorite time for baptism; the new Christians were decked out in spotless white and were greeted as the "new-born". On the Sunday after Easter they shared in the holy communion service; and to this day this Sunday bears the name "Quasimodogeniti" — namely "as the new-born." The old sinful man was buried with Christ; the new man, endowed with the riches of eternal life, arose with Him from out the grave. And baptism signifies nothing less than this, even though, with many of us who have spent our youth in a religious atmosphere, it loses the character of a radical conversion. But even those Israelites who were born in the desert were asked formally to accept the passing out of Egypt. In like manner the acceptance of the Christian life by young people who are surrounded by Christian influences culminates in Baptism. The words of an Augustine find an echo also in our hearts: "Never could I exhaust the thoughts of Thy love. Hot were the tears I wept at the songs of praise in Thy house. With their melodies did Thy truth find its way into my soul, granting me divine peace."

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

To become rooted in Christ to be taken into membership in His church—baptism means all that. And what is the church? First of all it is a fellowship of believers, professed followers of Christ, the crucified Head of the church. It is in the church that these await an enlargement of their spiritual life. The church serves a double purpose: to win new followers in the faith, and then to unite them for the purpose of fostering their spiritual growth. To supply our physical needs we re-

quire one another's help—the loving care of parents, family and friends, the service in a hundred different ways of the social environment which is ours. To supply our spiritual needs, a similar fellowship is needed. No man liveth to himself alone. The good news of the Gospel is brought to us by living men, not by angels; a Paul can say: "In Christ I have begotten you through the Gospel." He had wooed them as a bride for the Lord.

The Greek word for church and congregation is "ekklesia"—namely those "called forth" from a worldly life to fellowship with the Lord. In the Epistle to the Ephesians Paul works out this idea of the church. It stands for something vital and important in God's plan of salvation. Jesus had the church in mind in His whole work of redemption — its organization, its fruitful development, its mission in the world's history.

In the church the individual Christian is to undergo a process of Christward ripening to maturity. Hence we are never to think of the church lightly. In the days of the new covenant it represents the kingdom of God on earth, it holds in trust the Gospel as a great precious inheritance. And the Gospel has been entrusted to the church by Christ not merely for its own selfish use, but as a possession which is to be shared with others, till the "good news" be brought to all peoples and the evening bells of history ring.

In wondrous ways the Lord has preserved His church, has protected it, has again and again cleansed it and made it fruitful in every good work — despite all attacks to which it has been exposed, despite all its many strayings from the true path. The physical corporate body, which has appeared in history as the "church," has often been everything but what the name implies. The real representatives of the true tradition for whole centuries were quiet groups and brotherhoods, separate

from the larger body that was recognized by the state. It is these who have been the core of the church, have practiced the precepts of the Master and proved themselves His followers. In them especially the church has manifested itself as a kingdom not of this world, but one which bears the seal of eternity on its brow.

You — even you — now belong to this church, not merely as hitherto by way of enjoying its ministrations, but as an incorporated member, pledged to preserve its existence, to share in its battles and the solution of its problems. To want to be a follower of Christ and to refuse to join the church or to cooperate with some part of it for the furthering of the spiritual kingdom is not a sign of healthy Christianity, but rather a sign of egotistical spleen. Such isolation runs directly counter to Jesus' own plan of salvation.

It almost goes without saying that joining a church implies a certain amount of self-denial. It means that we are willing to modify our wishes, often very dear to us, as they come into conflict with the wishes and opinions of others. Yet clearly the Lord must have held such a working together in church as a wholesome bit of discipline. Life in general society makes exactly similar demands. Personal likes must give way before the general good. Surely it ought not be too difficult to carry such a principle over into the religious life. In working with others we gain much; their sympathy is ours to strengthen us; their example heartens us. We always intercede for and pity the friendless. Hence, let us cherish the words of the German poet:

> "Immer strebe zum Ganzen—und kannst
> Du selbst kein Ganzes werden: als ein dienendes Glied
> Schliess an ein Ganzes dich an."

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

As a member of a Christian church you ought to experience a feeling of exaltation. How lofty are the expressions of patriotism on the part of citizens in a prosperous land, which offers comfort and order within as well as security against aggressions of neighboring states. And the church is a kingdom not of this world, but towering over all earthly powers, whose ruler is the King of kings, which offers its citizens for time and eternity unspeakable riches, which pours out showers of blessings upon thousands of those who dwell at its frontier.

The founding of the Christian church marked for the world the beginning of a new era. The ancient nations had, it is true, created much that was worthy and noble. Egypt, Greece, and Rome produced splendid monuments of art, profound books of wisdom, and formally perfect poetry. Rome had built a great world empire, had made secure laws, and brought manufacture and trade to a flourishing state. But there was wanting for thinking men an inner peace that would satisfy. Spiritual happiness was for them a strange idea. They felt the tyranny of sensual pleasure, and no one knew how to shake it off. The old world was a world without love, without a purpose, without a future.

How different the outlook on life of those who accepted the Gospel and experienced its power! The pride of rabbi and philosopher was turned to humility; thieves and adulterers became law-abiding and virtuous; slaves acquired a consciousness of the nobility of manhood; woman learned to be the helpmate of man; the worth of childhood was recognized; labor was ennobled; the slothful were disgraced; Christianity brought with it family

life and Sunday. Even in war pity and compassion now found expression; some Christians turned against war entirely; on the whole it came to be a thing to be avoided.

Then, too, there were added the spiritual values which the church gave to the ancient world. The old horrors of paganism, human sacrifices, and immoral cults, gradually ceased to exist; pagan priests and fortune tellers could no longer lead the populace by the nose. And he who embraced Christianity won not only these external benefits, but an inner spiritual treasure. Faith in Christ brought peace for the soul, comfort in time of trouble, and a living hope of eternal life. Even life on earth took on meaning and dignity. Now for the first time science and art could develop in such wise as not to poison culture, but to deepen and ennoble it.

In the church itself new gifts of the Spirit made their appearance. Something scientifically unexplainable always faces us, does it not, when a sinner, snatched from sin, accepts the new life with Christ? It cannot be explained as a natural development. Every conversion is a miracle; every Christian gives evidence of supernatural influence. In the early days of the church, our Lord endowed His followers with special miraculous gifts. The apostles worked actual miracles; and even in later times miracles are not unknown. Many of the early witnesses of the Gospel were enabled to emulate the Master's own character in a remarkably impressive manner, witnessing for all time to what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus. We are reminded of the apostles and their immediate followers; of the saints of the first centuries; of a Polycarp and Justin the Martyr; of Irenaeus and Tertullian; Chrysostom and Augustine; Claudius of Turin and Ansgar; Saint Francis of Assisi and Tauler of Strasbourg; Hans Denk and Martin Luther; Hubmeier and Menno Simons; Spener and Wichern. These and

other bearers of the Christian traditions were the noblest characters of their day, spending their lives in serving others and spreading spiritual sunshine. They were men, and had human faults and weaknesses, but this is no cause for denying them our veneration and esteem. We should feel the urgent desire to follow their holy paths, to emulate their zeal for the Master, to obey their teachings and the testimony of their experience.

THE CHURCH OF TODAY

It is important, too, that you preserve a lofty veneration for the meaning of the church in the present day. It is easy to turn critic, to see only the weaknesses and shortcomings, the mistakes and errors, the fanaticisms and distortions of Christianity, instead of looking first of all for the sunshine of gracious ministration which the church even today is spreading abroad in the world. When we examine a tree we do not begin by searching for rotten limbs; in looking at a field of grain we do not first of all count the weeds; nor in dealing with a dear friend do we make a list of his weaknesses and faults. We do not take pleasure in contemplating injustice, but in truth.

The church of Jesus Christ is still at this day a divine tabernacle among men; though one may apply to it the words: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Its sanctity rests first of all upon the fact that Christ is its Lord and Head; then in its confession and doctrines; furthermore in the supernatural powers of living forces within it; lastly in its own members, in so far as they express their Master's likeness. These are still, to be sure, in a process of growth; but the Lord exercises patience, permits His Holy Spirit to discipline them, endows them with increase of gifts making for holiness, fits them for

good works. Yes, even today do we have in the Christian church a kingdom of God on earth, growing unto perfection. The Lord has not yet departed from His people, though saddening things occur among them; with His gifts and His Spirit He is still with His own and is glorified in them in diverse ways.

"The church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation,
By water and the Word;
From heav'n He came and sought her
To be His holy Bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.

"Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food;
And to one hope she presses,
With every grace endued."

Even in the dark years of the Middle Ages Christ made the light of His Gospel to shine in the church and caused men to arise and religious movements to spring up which preserved the true knowledge of salvation. Particularly in the sixteenth century was His power manifest. Like the children of Israel were led out of Egypt, so the church of Christ was rescued from the rule of the Papacy and brought to a new lease of life. And afterwards, in the time of arid dogmatism, it was He who granted a new and true vision of the essence of His discipleship. Then, too, it was discovered, that merely to rail and scold at "heresy and heretics" was not necessarily a sure sign of holiness. In the so-called "pietistic movement" there were found little groups of "churches

within the church," in which true children of God gathered themselves about the Word of God and learned to acknowledge Jesus the Crucified.

And at the close of the eighteenth century the movements toward a more spiritual life were overwhelming. In all of Christendom a new wind as of spring blew over the land. Christians learned again the lesson of charity, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive;" institutions for doing good, for saving the lowly and the fallen, sprang up everywhere. Children became an object of care in the Sunday school. The Bible found its way into the smallest hut through the activity of Bible societies. The church again learned the art of preaching, not in words only, but in deeds of love, particularly in the field of foreign missions.

The rise of foreign missions is a wonderful, mysterious fact of history which gives evidence of the living presence among men of a supernatural power. The various branches of the church are here noble rivals eager to aid each other. The missionary pioneers are truly men typical of the first apostles, endowed with similar spiritual gifts. Think of a John Eliot and a Brainerd working among the Indians; Schwarz among the Tamils; Williams in the South Seas; Livingstone and Crowther in Africa; Judson in Burma—and many others. Think of the year 1900 in China and the martyr's death of 150 missionaries, women and children, and we must declare that even the church of the twentieth century carries on its brow the sign of triumph, despite all the tendencies toward unbelief which find expression within her ranks. A joyous feeling of optimism is still justified today.

"The cause is Thine, Lord Jesus Christ —
Why should we therefore quail?
For since it's all in Thine own hand
It must not, cannot fail!"

CONCERNING DENOMINATIONS

Yet in the midst of our enthusiasm for the work of our church as a whole, we must not lose our interest in the particular bodies of Christians with which we are most closely associated. We must above all give our attention to the group to which we ourselves belong as church members.

The fact that we have a share in the larger history of mankind does not imply that we ought to despise our own nation or our own family. You cannot appreciate distant people until you first appreciate those near at home. "Know thyself" is still the best way to understand one's neighbors. The Lord, in fostering His church, has not found it wise to destroy differences of race or nationality, of language or customs. The primitive church accommodated itself to the peculiarities of the several peoples among which it found a home. In Jerusalem prayers were said in Hebrew, in Corinth prayers were said in Greek; there the hair was worn long; here short. For Jewish readers Paul cited only the Old Testament; for the Greeks he added on occasion a verse from a Greek poet. Hence of necessity separate church organizations grew up with differing social and likely varying religious customs; yet these differences did not endanger proper development. Paul insists again and again upon the one thing which must serve to harmonize the various branches of the church—spiritual unity and the service of love. In the performance of deeds of charity he even advised a friendly rivalry between churches.

The attempt in the Middle Ages to enforce the uniform use of the Latin language in the church service as well as uniform ritual can be traced to the influence of

pagan Rome. God, it appears, did not desire to oppose the development of divergent tendencies and external variety among the several branches of the church. A normal life process always results in a variety of species. Viewed thus the artificial uniformity of the Catholic church is not to be praised off-hand, nor the sectarianism of the Protestant church to be condemned.

The several branches of the Protestant church can be compared to the sections of a city, some being near the central square, others at a distance; or with the branches of a tree, some drawing more, some less, of the life-giving sap of the tree trunk; or with the single members of a family, some following family tradition closely, others diverging from the characteristics of the group. The various Christian groups should acknowledge their membership in the same family, should bear a friendly spirit toward each other, mutually recognizing and encouraging their several good traits, and practicing Christian courtesies. And this does not imply an indifference toward our own convictions of what we think right and what we think wrong.

However, wherever we see in a sister denomination hesitancy in expressing a clear and open avowal of Christ the Crucified, there we exercise caution and a certain mistrust; and we must avoid joining organically with any group which denies this central Christian doctrine. With the Unitarians, for example, we cannot unite inasmuch as Jesus for them is only the noblest of men, not the unique Son of God. We ought, therefore, to be all the more eager to observe sympathetically those church groups which agree with us most closely in our confessions of Christ—the Baptists, the Methodists, the Reformed, the Hermhuters, and the Lutheran churches, and others. Surely we can only profit from an intercourse with these, emphasizing our likenesses, and not magnifying our dif-

ferences. A great deal of living Christianity may often be combined with faulty theological formulas. We often discover, in dealing with single representatives of differing denominations, that they resemble us in their inner life much more than confessional differences would lead us to expect.

"City of God, how broad and far
Outspread thy walls sublime!
The true, thy chartered freedom, are
Of ev'ry age and clime.

"One holy church, one army strong,
One steadfast high intent,
One working band, one harvest-song,
One King omnipotent!"

Many a pious Catholic finds Christ, making his way past all the saints which his church places as obstructions in his path. The heart is often better than the head; the religion of work and life better than its intellectual formulation. "We know only in part," and there are points in our own teaching and life with which others must likewise deal kindly. However, much we cling to our definite creed, we should still exercise tolerance toward other earnest Christians, so that we may learn from others, work with them and join heartily in the ancient confession: "I believe in one holy general church; the communion of saints."

You will, accordingly, accept the principle that you owe a thankful piety toward that branch of the "one church" in which you are enrolled as a member. It is right and proper to speak of an inherited spiritual home. Think of how we cherish our earthly home! The poet says:

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land."

Precious are the emotions with which we greet that bit of earth where we first saw the rising of the sun, where we dreamed the first child's dreams! Even more precious ought to be our spiritual fatherland, the church in which our youth found its spiritual inheritance; the chapel toward which we walked as boy or girl, led by father or mother; the songs and melodies in which our earliest religious instinct found expression. We never escape such memories—the preacher whose words touched the heart's core; the Sunday school teacher whose instructions moulded our moral convictions. The power of these early influences it is difficult for you to estimate. A Christian education, with its manners and customs together with your church environment, has inevitably created your standards and views in religious and social matters. And thanks are due to those who have performed this service, even though later years and enlarged experience may modify your views on many things learned in youth. We must never forget that parents, teachers, and preachers have done their best.

A similar attitude of piety should be ours toward the larger church group to which they belonged and which they rightly expect that we too shall join. Even in cases where children change their religious convictions, they ought to remain thankful for the good which they have received in their church home, and ought to deal sparingly in criticisms of its shortcomings.

The happiest condition arises in our Mennonite denomination, with its practice of adult baptism based on personal confession of faith, if our youth share with their elders not merely the child-like faith in Jesus Christ, but also the belief in the Biblical correctness of our denominational peculiarities. That is what happened, my young Christian, with you.

"Home's not merely four square walls,
Though with pictures hung and gilded —
Home is where affection calls —
Where its shrine the heart has builded."

You have found a home in a Mennonite congregation and in the Mennonite church. Naturally one may expect you to learn to feel at home and at ease with us, and that you strive to acquaint yourself with the denomination which you have joined. Much of its organization you have probably accepted without being able to defend it in argument. The old Waldensians called their young Christians "the beginners." These have come to a decision on the main issue; many other issues will have to be examined lovingly, accepted or born cheerfully. One fact you will probably have seen already—namely that the Mennonite church has a firm Biblical basis for its teachings and its institutions, that she can consider herself to be a sound branch of the church at large, hence that she has, historically considered, the right to build up an independent church organization. Some of its doctrines you may have met in a somewhat shattered state—but even the Mennonites are not a finished Christian product; they, too, must purge themselves from one thing and another, and must strive to rejuvenate their original convictions. On the whole, however, you have come into possesion of a rich inheritance. And with it comes the challenge

"What's thine as heir to God-fearing fathers,
Prove thyself worthy of it, to possess it!"

YOURS IS A RICH INHERITANCE

The history of the Mennonite church is indeed a precious legacy. May you acquire a secure title to this your inheritance by learning just what it signifies to be a Mennonite!

As you may know, we derive our name from Menno Simons, not that he was the founder of our denomination, but because in the sixteenth century he secured a position of prominence in it by reason of his wide activity and his excellent writings. As a matter of fact, the history of the Mennonites is only a part of a much longer tradition of similar religious movements extending back as far as the early church. Our ancestors strove as best they knew to preserve the doctrine and organization of the Christianity of apostolic times. In the primitive church, for example, there was no church of priests, modelled on the Old Testament, nor was there a state church, copying the organization of the Roman Empire. We find, instead, a local congregational government in which the ministers and the congregation itself made decisions. From this principle the church at large departed more and more until it had created the Roman church of bishops and state control, culminating in the Papacy.

And the same time, during the second and third centuries, small groups or brotherhoods led a life of their own under various names, retaining the characteristics of the apostolic church. There were the Novatians of the third century; the Donatists and Priscilians of the fourth; the Paulicians of the seventh and eighth; the Euchites and Bogomiles of the eighth and ninth; the Cathars of the tenth and eleventh; finally the Waldensians of the twelfth to the sixteenth century. They differed on many points, even holding at times unorthodox doctrines, but they retained the character of brotherhoods which could rightly call themselves "old evangelical churches." It is an accepted fact today that they had points of contact between themselves. By the fifth century these isolated groups had suffered great losses. They had endured much persecution and found it impossible to preserve many of their early practices. But those who

remained steadfast did succeed in rescuing the essential principals of traditional congregationalism and to breathe new life into it in the second quarter of the sixteenth century.

In Bohemia such a reformation dates as early as 1463 and 1467. In Switzerland, in southern Germany, and along the Rhine, there was formed from 1525 onwards a whole network of large and small congregations, separately organized, calling themselves "Anabaptists" or "Taeufer," practicing adult baptism and striving to imitate apostolic Christianity.

But this promising movement suffered defeat at the hands of the combined hostility of Rome and the Protestant state churches. Its representatives were forced to flee and wander, homeless and depised, in search of scattered kindly princes, patrons, or landlords. Indeed they were able in course of time to experience more than one evidence of God's mysterious ways of preserving His own. Bloody fanaticism, too, ran its course after a time, and even their enemies were often won over by closer contact with this solid, practical Christianity. In Holland they gained official toleration after 1579. They were officially welcomed to Prussia after 1562, and were soon highly praised because of their services in agricultural pioneering in the valley of the Vistula, as well as for their quiet piety. They were granted numerous privileges by the Prussian and Polish kings, which insured their denominational peculiarities. And when these privileges were later being threatened, Russia in 1786 threw open to them her wide prairies, granting them such generous privileges as, perhaps, no church group in modern history has enjoyed.

America saw its first permanent Mennonite settlers in 1683 with the founding of Germantown. Further immigration was encouraged by William Penn, as well as

the English king. In the eighteenth century thousands of Mennonites, coming from southern Germany and Switzerland, found a new home in Pennsylvania. Toward the close of the nineteenth century other groups from Prussia and Russia came and settled in the Middle West. Today Mennonite settlements encircle the globe.

THE SIMPLE FAITH OF THE MENNONITES

The doctrinal teachings of our denomination are venerable and of close and strict dependence upon the Bible, resembling on the whole those of other Protestant groups. Our ancestors, however, did not lay quite as much stress as did other churches upon so-called Confessions of Faith. They did not think it wise to make the views of pious men of one generation binding for others under different circumstances. Whenever painful controversy with their enemies forced them to state their beliefs, they usually contented themselves with short sentences, embodying their chief convictions, not indulging in condemnations of those who differed from them. Such confessions we find in the appendix to the Waldension translation of the Bible, known as the Codex Teplensis; another was formulated at Schleitheim, near Schaffhausen, in the year 1527, in seven articles, which was much honored throughout the sixteenth century among the "Taeufer" (later Mennonites) of Switzerland and Germany. The most influential confessions among the loosely organized churches of Holland and northern Germany were those of Cologne (1591) and Dortrecht (1632). In the year 1771, finally, a Dutch preacher, Cornelius Ris, carefully gathered together these scattered expressions, combining them in a confession of 36 "Articles of Faith," which may rightly be considered the mature

"Symbol" of the Mennonites, sealed with the blood of martyrs.

These various creedal documents give evidence of the soundest Christian doctrine and offer proof that the Mennonites do not constitute a sect. They cling to the so-called Apostles' Creed and emphasizes the Holy Scripture as the one sufficient guide in matters of Christian life and doctrine. Only in words actually found in the Bible were they willing to speak finally of the mysteries of Christian faith; the doctrine of the Trinity; the corruption of human nature; the incarnation of Christ; the redemption through Him; and the sanctification of mankind. They never looked with enthusiasm upon the scientific elaboration of these matters, holding that thus the simple kernel of truth might easily be lost.

"O Word of God Incarnate,
O wisdom from on high,
O Truth unchanged, unchanging,
O Light of our dark sky;
We praise Thee for the radiance
That from the hallowed page,
A lantern to our foot-steps
Shines on from age to age.

"The Church from her dear Master
Received the gift divine,
And still that light she lifteth,
O'er all the earth to shine.
It is the golden casket
Where gems of truth are stored;
It is the heav'n-drawn picture
Of Christ the living Word."

Our ancestors sought the essence of Christianity less in a ready-made system of intellectual formulas than in a practical exercise of Christian virtues. A child-like faith in Christ should find expression in obedience to His

Word; becoming His disciple should free life from sin and make us resemble Him.

The practical epistle of James has always ranked high with the Mennonites. Truth and honor, uprightness, simplicity, work, love of neighbor, charity, avoidance of worldly pleasures—these were general ethical standards. When these were followed, personal differences in interpreting Biblical doctrines might appear with out leading to organic separation. It was demanded simply that in the final analysis the word of Jesus should be obeyed. His words were not to be softened down or explained away. Hence arose the emphasis upon baptism upon confession of faith—"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

Hence, likewise, the refusal of taking an oath and of service in war. And it is important to note that many men of wide culture in non-Mennonite circles acknowledge the rightness of these our principles, though they may speak of them as too idealistic. An oath after all is worthless for him who is in right relation with his God. And as for war—the greatest general of the last century was ready to declare that war is a national calamity even for the victors. If others are persuaded that they must submit when military service is forced upon them, we do not feel called upon to condemn them. We, however, are glad to be able to point to the history of our ancestors and to say: No blood clings to their hands; they engaged in no persecutions; they burned no witches; they testified boldly before kaiser and king, in written petition and in person, that the military glory of a nation is not worth the price it costs; that a man's personal relations to God are of greater weight than his duties toward the state; and that Jesus Christ, the great Prince of Peace, has called upon His followers to bring and establish peace on earth.

And our denomination can modestly point to the practical highmindedness of its leaders and members as proof of the rightness of its principles. Our church has never accepted the theory that only a special clerical class, like monks and nuns, was expected by the Lord to exhibit His way of life. She held from the start that the kingdom of God was represented on earth by the churches which should live a life of holiness. Hence she practiced church discipline, obedience to the word of the apostle: "Put away the wicked man from among yourselves." She did not interpret church discipline as did Calvin in Geneva who placed offenders against church law into the common jail.

For the Mennonites, church and state were distinctly separate. The dominion of state should be influenced by the light of the Gospel, but should not be co-ordinated with the church itself. The relations between church and state here in America correspond very closely with the theories of our ancestors who thus anticipated modern developments by centuries. No state power should force any man to subscribe to religious confessions which he himself is not spiritually prepared to acknowledge. There should, instead, arise in every man a personal Christian conviction regarding his relation to his God.

OUR HEROIC TASK

As the peculiar character of any church group expresses itself most vividly in its leaders, so it is that Mennonitism can best be studied in our heroic ancestors. And of such heroes there are a goodly number—godly men, whose footprints on the sands of time can still be seen, to be humbly followed by us their successors. One may recall a Priscillian of Spain, the first martyr to the doctrine of church freedom under a state church; a Peter

Waldus, who ended a richly useful life in Bohemia in 1215; a Bishop Reiser, who was burned to death in Strasbourg in 1458; a Felix Manz of Zurich; a George Blaurock in Switzerland and the Tyrol; a Hubmeier with his watchword: "The truth is eternal;" a Hans Denk with his confession: "Only he can know Christ who follows in His steps with a life of holiness;" a Menno Simons with his insistence upon the great fact: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ;" a John Deknatel with his counsel: "Nothing is to any avail, if the heart be not converted and Christ become our life." One may recall, too, the "Friends of God" in the Middle Ages, a Nicolas of Basel and others, who were called by Tauler the pillars of the church, men who arrested for a time its threatened ruin, and one has a gallery of saintly personalities which does honor to the church universal.

Again, how many pious teachers and preachers have labored in our churches down to the present day! They may have been wanting in learning and theological training, and they may often have been unappreciated by the congregations which they served, but as well as they could they conducted their pastoral work in addition to the labors of earning their daily bread, in many cases with marvelous patience and devotion. Literally they realized what Paul said: "I seek not yours, but you." Their names are perhaps forgotten; neither monumental brass nor the page of history preserves a record of their work, but in fashioning good for their own day, they nevertheless live for all time. Though they lacked technical training, yet our ancestors had little cause to feel ashamed of their representatives in comparison with those of other religious groups.

And the wide circle of our church membership has been characterized by a simple piety and moral excellence; seldom has a Mennonite stood before a criminal

court; seldom have divorces occured among our people. Political affairs were avoided. In America the Mennonites have for the most part abstained from speculative ventures. They have contended themselves with the returns from peaceful agriculture or a modest business, together with the recreation belonging to family and friendly intercourse. Life among many Mennonite communities has been a model experiement in so-called social Christianity. To do one's work in all quietness, to earn one's own daily bread, to live a peaceful life in the fear of God and without honor before men is surely an exemplification of apostolic Christianity. Both friend and foe have, in respect to the daily life of its members, paid our denomination the highest testimonials.

The history of the Mennonites reveals, in the midst of much that is noble and worthy, also much that is pitiable and sad. Our forefathers, following in the Masters's footsteps, have joined suffering to joy. A "little flock" they were a "church under the cross." Blood and tears have written many a page of their history. As the Roman empire persecuted the early martyrs, so the state churches of Europe, possessing the power, tortured the long-suffering Mennonites. A collection of laws and decrees issued specifically against them would fill many volumes. The living power of religion found in our forefathers glorious vindication. Many became heroes and heroines, enduring frightful tortures without yielding their faith, or giving evidence against their fellows. The letters and confessions which they have left us constitute a legacy such as perhaps no other denomination possesses. In our so-called "Martyrs' Mirror" many of these are gathered together, worthy of being read at this day . It has been said of these heroes of the faith: "They had tasted of that well which yields power of life, so that they were able to conquer every fear of death."

"Faith of our fathers, living still,
  In spite of dungeon, fire, and sword—
O how our hearts beat high with joy,
  Whene'er we hear that glorious word.
Faith of our fathers, we will love
  Both friend and foe in all our strife,
And preach thee too, as love knows how,
  By kindly words and virtuous life.
Faith of our fathers, holy faith,
  We will be true to thee till death."

I urge you to become acquainted with the main outlines of Mennonite history. A few dollars rightly expended for the proper books will bring rich returns; indeed some knowledge in these matters in indispensable for retaining a warm loyalty in your faith.

The influence of our forefathers has extended far and wide. Many of their persecutors were forced to acknowledge the earnestness of their Christian life and to urge upon their own followers attempts at imitation. Our insistence upon religious freedom has aroused the attention and won the assent of many an influential mind in the state churches. Tyranny, indeed, in civil life as well was disapproved of by our members. The first protest against slavery in our country was formulated by Mennonites and Quakers in the year 1688.

In particular the so-called pietistic movements have been seconded by our own emphasis upon personal Christian exprerience as the basis for church life. Tersteegen visited gladly among our people and preached once in the Mennonite church of Crefeld. The numerous Mennonites who in course of time joined the Reformed church in the Rhine regions exercised a valuable influence. We may regret the loss of many of our brethren who have found a home elsewhere, but we are happy in the fact that in their new surroundings they have usually continued to further true Christianity.

Yet in the midst of these indications for rejoicing on our part, we must not forget to take note of our faults and shortcomings, and the lapses from the true faith which have occured in many of our communities. It is fitting that we call attention to the weak places in our own house. Times of peace have proved costly, enticing many to fall away from the ancestral earnestness and piety. Again, the change from a time of persecution to one of tolerance has caused many a community unduly to cleave to customs of a bygone day, refusing to change them under new conditions, thus preserving the letter rather than the spirit of a worthy tradition.

The training of new generations of teachers and church leaders has often been sadly neglected. Dependence was frequently placed upon books and inspirational writings of other church groups with a consequent neglect of our own. No urge was felt toward increasing the influence of the church among non-Mennonites. Even at home there was not seldom a falling off in true piety. The principle of church democracy has been overemphasized, thus preventing often the most necessary unity of effort. Attempts at spiritual approach or joint activity were crippled by stressing congregational independence. The opposite error has also made its appearance—a clinging to the church as an institution to the neglect of individual Christian growth. Church discipline became at times a tyranny rather than a pedagogic means of saving the weak and rescuing the stumbling. Periods of dead orthodoxy have made their appearance among us, times when mere outward acceptance of traditional confessions of faith, together with the successful management of one's affairs seemed to constitute the sum total of living religion and when the inner workings of God's grace were little thought of.

Clearly, we too, have good reason to walk humbly

before our God, thankful at the same time that in times of decay God has always raised up among us true watchmen who cried out from the towers of Zion: "Awake, my people, from slumber, and turn again to the Lord!" thus pointing the way anew to the Rock of our salvation.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE—SOME CONCRETE SUGGESTIONS

The fact that you have joined a church and a definite denomination ought to imply, therefore, that you help do its God-given work, that you sympathize with its peculiar convictions, that you undertake to toil for its betterment and its purification—in short, that you become a member of a church as well as a Christian. Church membership should be neither over- nor undervalued. Church orthodoxy is not the heart of Christianity, but it constitutes the framework within which the Christian life must develop—like the egg shell which acts as a protection for the living organism within. It is quite possible, of course, that a man be outwardly a strict Mennonite, defending adult baptism, refusing oath and military service, yet possessing little or nothing of God's inward grace. Granted, however, that he does live a life of grace, then surely he will not neglect his duties as a member of a larger Christian confession. We have it upon the authority of Jesus and the apostels that the individual Christian is expected to further his own religious growth in close connection with others, making use of church facilities.

We dare not be today indifferent toward inherited and historically developed formulas of church life. It becomes a plain duty to preserve and to honor the church, in its visible manifestations—its doctrines, organizations, and ritual. Familiarize yourself, therefore, with the general and peculiar tenets of our church and with their

expressions in the several periods of its history. The Mennonites emphasize the training in these matters not only on the part of their intellectual leaders, but of the rank and file as well. Try to appreciate your church organization historically.

In church conferences you will do well at first to act the part of pupil and beginner humbly accepting traditional ways until you are sure that they require alteration. Do not be surprised that older brethern cling tenaciously to these inherited customs and beliefs. Conservatism frequently fails to see good in the new, but youthful enthusiasm needs in turn to appreciate the good in the old. Both parties in a church must exercise tolerance and an unselfish regard for the good of the whole and the furtherance of the kingdom of God. In congregational life as elsewhere it is necessary to give way in many matters.

Honor the work of the preacher and assume gladly a share in supporting it. To preach the Gospel in our day is no light thing. Think of the Sunday church service as a vital part of your religious life and do not take a seat in the rear when the benches in front are empty. Show by your actions that you have come to join in the singing and the prayers. Be prepared to pray for a real hunger for the truth as it may come to you in hymn or sermon. Ask others to join you in entering the walls of Zion and to share in the good things there dispensed. Take a hand in the work of the Sunday school and Christian Endeavor, and serve with such gifts as are yours. Your church rightly hopes that you will prove to be an asset and not a liability. Be ready to help in preserving the institutions and arrangements of the church, which may continue to work for good even should you yourself be no longer present.

We need schools and a Mennonite literature. Do not

withdraw your support from such undertakings even though many things are being done otherwise than you would have them. Do not forget that the onlooker from the outside often understands the game better than the players themselves.

Make of foreign missions a cause lying close to your heart. The Lord has blessed the work of Mennonite missions. In Java it was a Mennonite missionary who translated the Bible into the native tongue; congregations of Mennonite persuasion exist both in Java and Sumatra; in India our missionary enterprises are flourishing; in our own land our missionaries are in possession of several Indian languages, are translating the Bible bit by bit, are fostering small Indian congregations, and have been of bodily and spiritual service to many a poor heathen. Willingness to share in such services ought to be on our part a matter of course. Perhaps at no time in history has the average Christian had a better chance to make his own the parting words of pious Matthias Claudius: "My son, do not leave the world without having expressed your love for your Saviour publicly by some deed."

The final basis, however, for the prospering of the church is after all a personal Christian life, a personal piety resulting from the communion of the individual with his God, a daily partaking of the wells of living water. Church orthodoxy cannot be a substitute for personal piety; for the former consists often of religious exercises in connection with which the heart my remain cold. Yet it is precisely the heart, the inner disposition of the soul experiencing God's grace, the inner assurance of His help which makes the Christian. Growth in the Christian life must begin with a laying hold upon Christ Himself. "As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and builded up in Him."

Such a process of growth requires time. The Bible

calls it sanctification. It implies that the Christian free himself more and more from the rule of evil and that he strive toward ever closer likeness to Jesus Christ. Much has been gained when a young person has decided to follow Jesus, but he still resembles, to begin with, the student who enters a school or the tree newly planted; now the student is expected to study and the tree to grow. Young Christians, accordingly, must not think of themselves as finished products, but should strive toward further knowledge and greater faith. Try to secure the proper spiritual food. Acquaint yourself thoroughly at the start with those portions of Holy Scripture which can serve as guide to young Christians—the Gospels, for example, and the epistle to the Thessalonians. Become familiar also with the hymns of the Christian church and with good inspirational books—such works as Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, Baxter, Augustine's Confessions, Pascal's Thoughts. Take an account of the experiences of pious men, and do not neglect to learn from parents, teachers, and pastors. Riches in knowledge must be industriously sought for. Young Christians should above all guard against harmful, frivolous, and atheistic literature. They would do well to follow the suggestions of wiser and older men. The world of literature contains enough of the truly beautiful and inspiring that no one need concern himself with dangerous books unless his profession demands it.

PROBLEMS OF SOCIAL LIFE

Especially in their social life young Christians need to exercies caution and to follow such directions as Holy Scripture offers as well as the guidance of the Spirit of God in the breast of the individual. For a wrong social life soon becomes a great danger. There is no reason why

young Christians should not be happy and glad; a long face is no sign of holiness. But piety must still reign in the midst of pleasure with Christians, else Chrisianity may become for them merely something to be taken with their daily tea. They should be careful in the forming of close friendships where seriousness is not part of the common bond. It is easy in such companionship to lose more than one gains. Christian young men and young women should practice a fine courtesy and tactful social manners, taking as guide the wisdom of the Bible, of history, and keen observance in life. They are responsible to God concerning the influence which they mutually exercise upon each other. They dare not play with the noblest feelings of the human soul; they dare not raise expectations which they do not feel capable of fulfilling. All those relations which lead to the marriage altar should be conducted in a manner which does not disturb their intimate communion with God. Joseph and Mary were found worthy as bethrothed of visitation by angels. This is worth thinking about by all who contemplate a similar relationship. Christian young people will do well to guard themselves against illusions in these matters. Paul Gerhard in his will gave his son the following advice: "When you arrive at a marriageable age, then marry with God's help and the advice of good, trustworthy, and sensible people." Don't overlook in your choice your present relations to your church, and make even this act a confession of faith.

Young Christians may remind themselves frequently that to become followers of Jesus Christ necessarily involves self-denial. The children of God have spoken and sung much of this. We, too, can confess with the poet:

"I would not live upon this earth
To drain the cup of sinful mirth—
No lasting joy earth's pleasure gives.

Close to the heart of God I'd keep:
My life in heav'nly bliss would steep
Which like my soul forever lives."

It means more than a little to be able to say with the poet Neander:

"Dieser Zeiten Eitelkeiten,
Reichtum, Wollust, Ehr und Freud,
Sind nur Schmerzen meinem Herzen,
Welches sucht die Ewigkeit."

Even in this our twentieth century many a sacrifice must be made for Jesus' sake. Prayer and the reading of Scripture do not offer much consolation when the heart is caught in the net of earthly desires which do not befit the Christian. Be eager, therefore, to walk only on such paths, be it in matters of business, or recreation, or social life, on which you would be bold enough to ask for Jesus as a companion. Young Christians may profitably cultivate a pacific and conciliatory attitude toward their fellows. Not every little disturbance should destroy the peace of the soul. Your hours of private worship and contemplation ought to remain very precious. Such quiet nourishing of the inner man before the face of God will prove of unspeakable help in the workday battles of life.

CONCLUSION

May you herewith, then, be entrusted to God's care and the gracious influence of His Holy Spirit. May you enjoy a rich life in the communion of His children. Among them you will find many companions, desirous with you of confessing, loving, and serving Him. They are your fellow travelers on the road to the home above. And their number is increased a thousandfold if we look into the past and think of the larger "communion of

saints." The Lord has His own in every class of society —kings and princesses, famous scholars and simple peasants, rulers and servants. Over land and over sea His praise is sung in a thousand tongues. All strive toward imitation of their Master. Their prayers help to carry your burdens; their yearnings for the coming of the kingdom include you. But your strongest companion is your Lord and Master Himself. Let your first care be to remain in communication with Him. Your newly won gift of grace needs to be kept unharmed. Do not be deceived in thinking that children of God are free from danger. They are capable of recognizing and conquering evil in its ever changing forms only by close commuion with and dependence upon the power from above. The church on earth is in part a Bethesda where the individual experiences much helpful love; but it is also a militant brotherhood, which, however, does not expect to carry the victor's palm in this world. Hence we should not expect too much even from our church fellowship. The church can give advice and encouragement to the individual; the ministry of divine service and the communion sacrament is expected to further and strengthen his life of faith; but in the last analysis no one can take another's place in the great trial of life; no one can substitute his own for another's growth, nor his own for another's victory. The race must be run by each for himself, and full fruition of grace and saintly communion must await the life beyond the grave. The church is but the outer court before the holy of holies above. She contains within herself unsaintly as well as saintly powers. It would be a mistake, therefore, to overvalue church Christianity. The one thing needful is after all a personal clinging to Christ. This is the grip that holds. It is this alone which can, in the hour of trial, range us among the wise virgins ready with lit lamps for the coming of the Bridegroom.

The test of your Christian life will be, therefore, your ability to remain close to Christ, drawing daily from His living stream of grace. How many—oh, how many!—have begun like you, making a covenant with the Lord, starting on their journey full of hope, and yet have gone astray. They ran a good race for a time and then lost the good way in the dark woods of human error, in running after will o' the wisps, in the pleasure of Vanity Fair. Many a Christian's religious conviction proved itself to be mere froth of feeling! The festive emotions evaporated, earthly sympathies filled the heart and drew it again into estrangement from God. So many, who once took firm hold on Christ, witnessed boldly for Him, and served Him with such enthusiasm, later became backsliders and fell in sin because they did not WATCH. How often Jesus speaks of the need for watchfulness, urging His disciples to cling to Him, His Word, and His saving grace. The branch must remain part of the vine if it is to bear fruit. Only he is a true disciple who lives in close contact with His word. "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord will find watching when He comes."

The apostolic churches—how frequently they needed encouragement, advice, guidance, and even disciplinary warnings. The whole of the New Testament was written for those already Christians. They were to carry the Gospel to others, but were, above all, to find their own nourishment in it. Christianity is a serious thing; nowhere is the evil one busier than in the church itself—hatching a heresy here, causing brothers to quarrel there, workers at the Lord's own temple, casting the veil of religious seeming over worldly ways, ensnaring prominent Christians in things of ill repute. Clearly it behooves us to remain ever on our guard with the sword of the Spirit unsheathed; to be a Christian means to be a warrior. And the battle is finally to be decided in single combat. Even though we may fight in company with others, finding en-

couragement for victory in our combined array, nevertheless each human soul must risk its all to attain the crown of glory.

May we, therefore, turn our faces continually to Jesus, "the Author and the Perfector of our faith."

"So long as Jesus love holds sway
His glory grows with each new day."

"Be with us, O Lord, all the days of this troublous life, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening falls, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in Thy great mercy grant us a safe lodging and a holy rest, and peace at the last."